

**Neighborhood Ten Study Committee  
Committee Meeting # 12  
Economic Development  
October 27, 2005**

**Committee members present:** Peter Sturges, Joan Marszalek, John Moukad, Bill Forster, Joshua Rowland, Bob Putnam, Rebekah Kaufman, Henry Lukas

**Staff present:** Taha Jennings, Elaine Thorne, Estella Johnson, Chris Basler, Sarah Rahman

**Discussion**

Staff from the Economic Development Division (EDD) of the Community Development Department distributed and explained three handouts, which were intended to help guide thinking regarding the retail mix and, commercial area identities for Neighborhood Ten:

- Retail linkages
- Target customer groups
- Opportunities for business mix

**Huron Village**

**Former Huron Drug Site**

EDD staff provided an update on the status of the former Huron Drug site. It was noted that Councilor David Maher had requested that the Economic Development Division contact Shore Drugs of Belmont (an independent pharmacy), in order to gauge interest in the Huron Village location. Representatives of that company explained to EDD staff that according to a potential owner, a \$2 to \$3 million investment is probably needed to open at the location. Staff noted that the community may not be large enough to support 150 prescriptions/day as is desired by most pharmacies, and it is important to think about the community's actual needs regarding a drug store. EDD staff also pointed out that there is a relatively extensive permitting and licensing process involved in opening a new pharmacy.

A committee member wanted to know what the property owner's plan for the space was in order to identify any overlap or discrepancy between their interests and the community's interests. According to conversations with the owner, they are open, but not limited to, the idea of another drugstore at the site.

A committee member suggested addressing the economic character of the neighborhood, the number of empty storefronts, and the amount of businesses that cycle through, rather than simply trying to get another pharmacy at the site. Some ideas for other retail that might be appreciated by neighborhood residents and families included an ice cream store, children's clothing store, or some other store with a focus on neighborhood families.

**Post Office Substation**

Staff pointed out that the United States Post Office has still expressed interest in the Huron Village area for a sub station, however the impression in general, is that the U.S.

Post Office is moving towards more electronic transactions. Committee members were, for the most part, appreciative of the news that the Post office would be willing to relocate in Huron Village. One committee member added that it seemed residents were most upset by the loss of the Post Office sub station when Huron Drug closed. Perhaps other types of establishments should be explored that would also compliment a post office. One idea expressed was a computer support type of service center. Someone asked staff if, in their opinion, the rent was considered reasonable at the former pharmacy site? Staff responded that based on what is known, they believed that the rent was in fact reasonable for the location.

#### Character of Huron Village

A committee member felt that the committee should think about the types of stores that would enhance the neighborhood rather than just what would look nice. It was stated that the retail establishments that recently left Huron Village, such as the drug store, post office, and Huron Spa, were the types of stores that added convenience for residents. The stores that replaced them are a more specialty type that don't provide the same convenience and may not last either. There was also some concern about the seemingly increasing number of vacancies and retail turnover in the Huron Village area. Some members of the study committee thought it might be a result of at least one property owner in the area that doesn't use a written lease with retail tenants. Although a staff member stated that they had the impression that those retail tenants were generally able to stay in their locations as long as they wanted to. Also, there are cases where a store may shut down due to a storeowner's personal or family reasons, which don't necessarily indicate a widespread problem in the retail environment of the area.

Staff explained that it will be helpful if residents provided more than one kind of store for which there may be interest in, and if possible even prioritized them. A committee member felt that it is important to get the message across to residents that they need to support businesses in Huron Village for it retain the character that they value. Staff reiterated the importance of supporting independently owned stores and explained that for every \$100 spent at a chain store, \$14 makes it back into the community, while for every \$100 spent at an independent store, \$53 is cycled back into the community. Some meeting attendees felt that it is important to discuss the types of stores the neighborhood wants and/or can use, and then ask the City for help obtaining them.

There were some questions about the success of some of the art-based stores in the area and whether Huron Village could establish itself as an art center. Someone noted that it seemed as if potential shoppers only wander in and look at merchandise rather than buy anything. Staff also noted that sometimes independently owned stores are, in fact, more expensive than a similar chain store, but they succeed because of positive relationships with the consumers and the community.

There was a question on whether business clusters (several retail establishments that sell similar or related items) form without any intervention or are established by design. EDD staff explained that they would not tell the business community what type of store to open, and retail clusters can form in different ways, many times it is through simple word of mouth.

There was a sense among the committee that the neighborhood is missing a place for adults to hang out leisurely, have a drink, and socialize. It was noted by another committee member that it is very desirable to have a place to connect with other people that goes beyond only market transactions. It was described as a “3<sup>rd</sup> place” after home and work. Darwin’s sandwich shop, which is also in Neighborhood Ten, was noted as a good example of this type of place.

### **Fresh Pond Parkway**

The retail strip along Fresh Pond Parkway is a concern for the Study Committee. Generally, Study Committee members in attendance agreed that more strip type retail is not desired in this location. The Committee expressed interest in what could be done to create more of a neighborhood feel for the area. Several committee members agreed that it would be desirable to have the stores facing the rest of the neighborhood rather than the busy roadway, also, if the area could become more of a destination for neighborhood residents.

The former Tokyo Restaurant building was noted as a good location in terms of its size and proximity to neighborhood, perhaps the site could help fill the demand in the neighborhood for some kind of adult gathering place.

There were also several observations that the area may be appropriate for affordable housing given the priority to affordable housing citywide, and price limitations in Neighborhood Ten. It was noted that housing at this location could increase the density and help to improve the area.

There were some questions however, about what the Study Committee, neighborhood residents, and even the City, could actually do, given that the stores and buildings are all privately owned. The Study Committee also pondered why there hasn’t been more activity regarding improvements and redevelopment at the location. EDD staff explained that in this particular situation it has been challenging to locate the actual building owners. Staff also noted that given the proximity to Fresh Pond Parkway, it might be possible to work with the State to help address some issues on the properties.

It was mentioned that the Committee and the City should think about ways to influence the urban design at the site without discouraging redevelopment. It was mentioned that it seemed that this area on Fresh Pond Parkway is in need of new thinking. Someone suggested that the City develop a holistic approach to improving the area. It was also reiterated that the Study Committee should encourage the City to take a closer look at the area and consider a mixed-use development that expands the neighborhood. However, any strategy for improving the area should be comprehensive. Affordable housing, inverted buildings, and development incentives should all be considered.